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SCIENCE

A Weekly Journal devoted to the Advancement of Science, publishing the official notices and proceedings of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, edited by J. McKeen Cattell and published every Friday by

THE SCIENCE PRESS
11 Liberty St., Utica, N. Y. Garrison, N. Y.
New York City: Grand Central Terminal

Single Copies, 15 Cts. Annual Subscription, \$6.00

Entered as second-class matter January 21, 1922, at the Post Office at Utica, N. Y., under the Act of March 3, 1879.

VOL. LV MARCH 10, 1922 No. 1419

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THE ORGANIZATION OF KNOWLEDGE¹

IN an admirable introduction to Herbert Spencer's Synthetic Philosophy, by Alfred W. Tillet, occurs the suggestive observation that "one volume after another might be glanced at or even carefully read and no idea whatever obtained as to Spencer's *aim*." Even the *Study of Sociology*, in the words of this author, "does not give any definite idea of the aim of Spencer's work" but no one "even superficially familiar with a moderate portion of Spencer's monumental contributions to knowledge can fail to be impressed by the fact that it is from end to end an organized system of scientific knowledge."

What after all is the real difference between scientific and general knowledge, or between organized and unorganized information? Is it not rather a difference in structure than in function, for, as said by Karl Pearson, "the classification of facts, the organization of their sequence, and relative significance, is the function of science," which must be the objective of every attempt to gather and classify the knowledge extant on any particular subject. The moment we desire to apply a given train of thought to some practical purpose we are confronted by the necessity of understanding facts in their relative significance.

Yet so difficult is the practical task of arriving at sound conclusions in the presence of some complex phenomenon that even civilized man reasons as a rule in disregard of scientific principles, indifferent to the value or necessity of organized knowledge as a substitute for disorganized or chaotic information. The cause of this anomaly is of course quite obvious; the former process requires painstaking care in the accumulation and classification of facts,

¹ Address of the vice-president and chairman of Section K—Social and Economic Science, Toronto, December, 1921.